

## Reading Guide to *Rules* by Cynthia Lord

### ABOUT THIS BOOK

Twelve-year-old Catherine just wants a normal life, which is near impossible when you have a brother with autism and a family that revolves around his disability.

She's spent years trying to teach her brother, David, the rules from "a peach is not a funny-looking apple" to "keep your pants on in public"—in order to head off David's embarrassing behaviors. But the summer Catherine meets Jason, a surprising, new, sort-of friend, and Kristi, the potential next-door friend she's always wished for, it's her own shocking behavior that turns everything upside down and forces her to ask: What is normal?

Filled with humor and warmth, Cynthia Lord's debut novel takes a candid and sensitive look at feeling different and finding acceptance—beyond the rules.

### ABOUT THIS AUTHOR

Cynthia Lord has been writing since high school. A mother of two children, one of whom has autism, she says, "I wrote RULES to explore some of my own questions about living with someone who sees the world so differently than I do, but also to show a full experience of family life with a child with autism: the happy moments, the heartbreaking ones, the ones that make me laugh."

She lives with her husband, children, and a Bichon Frise in an old house in coastal Maine. A former teacher, behavioral specialist, and bookseller, she now enjoys writing for children.

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. When you hear the word "rules," how do you feel and what comes to your mind?
2. Are rules necessary in some situations? What good purposes do they serve? When can rules be a negative thing?
3. Name some rules in your own life. What rules do your parents have for you? Are there rules in your classroom or library? Do you have some rules for yourself?

4. If you could create a set of rules for your sibling, what would those rules be? Some examples might be related to borrowing your things or how to act when you have a friend visiting.
5. A main character usually has an outer problem and an inner problem that creates the conflict in the book. What does Catherine want that is outside herself? What does she want within herself?
6. What has kept Catherine from achieving those "wants" before the book begins?
7. Describe Catherine's relationship with David.
8. How does David stand in the way of what Catherine wants for herself? What has she done to try to resolve that?
9. Do your siblings ever stand in the way of what *you* want? How? What have you done to solve that?
10. How are Catherine's rules good for David? How do her rules hold him back?
11. How do Catherine's rules hold *her* back?
12. What are Catherine's feelings about Jason when she first meets him?
13. If you were drawing word cards for Jason, what would you have drawn for "gross?" "Awesome?" "Stinks a big one!!!"
14. What are Catherine's strengths? What are her weaknesses?
15. How do her weaknesses cause events to worsen in the story?
16. What contradictions exist in Catherine? In Jason? In Kristi?
17. Name at least three characters who exhibit prejudice in RULES. What do they say or do which shows that prejudice?
18. How do Catherine's feelings change toward Jason as the book continues? What causes that change?
19. What do you think would've happened if Catherine had been honest right away with Kristi and told her about Jason? Why wasn't Catherine honest? What do you think she was afraid of?

20. Catherine is not the only character in the story who is not always honest. How do the other characters avoid dealing with problems or act in ways that are not completely truthful?

21. Do you think it's true that "Leaving out isn't the same as lying?" If not, is it *ever* true?

22. Some of Catherine's rules are what we might call "unwritten rules," comments on how people behave, such as "Sometimes people don't answer because they didn't hear you. Other times it's because they don't *want* to hear you." How do people learn these rules? Why do we have them?

23. When Kristi has David dance in Catherine's room, is she being mean? Since *he* wasn't upset by it, should Catherine have stopped the music?

24. What choices does Catherine make near the end of the book that show growth on her part?

25. What does Catherine risk in inviting Jason to the dance? Do you think that risk was worth it? Why or why not?

26. What does Catherine give up at the dance? What does she give up in the final chapter with David?

27. If Catherine were to write a rule at the very end of the book, what do you think it would be?

28. What do you think might happen next for Catherine with Kristi? What choices does Catherine have?

29. Have you ever had a conflict with a new friend? How did you resolve it?

30. Have you ever had to choose between two friends? What did you do?

31. Can you list the ways water is important in the story?

32. Name the different modes of communication in the book.

33. How does art figure into this story? Music? Books? How do those create a connection between the characters?

34. Name the ways wishing and magic play a part in the story.